

125

# Illinois English Bulletin

Historical Linguistics in the  
Classroom

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October, 1960



# ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

Official Publication of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English

VOL. 48, No. 1

URBANA, ILLINOIS

OCTOBER, 1960

Published every month except June, July, August, and September. Subscription price, \$2.00 per year; single copies, 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter October 29, 1941, at the post office at Urbana, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Address all business communications to Harris Wilson, 109 English Building, Urbana, Illinois. Address manuscripts and other editorial communications to Wilmer A. Lamar, Editor, Stephen Decatur High School, Decatur, Illinois, or to Frank Moake, Co-Editor, 109 English Building, Urbana, Illinois. Member of the NCTE Information Agreement.

## Historical Linguistics in the Classroom

BY LOUIS A. MUINZER

In the *Illinois English Bulletin*, May, 1960, I attempted to set forth the underlying principles of historical linguistics.<sup>1</sup> It is my firm belief that the study of these principles and their ramifications should play an important role in the training of the prospective English teacher. Indeed, it stands to reason that if a teacher knows little about the historical study of language, his command of his chosen subject must be two-dimensional and superficial; it is not enough to know how to describe the English language at a given time. To teach English as it exists in a given era, one must know much about the forces which are constantly reshaping it, and which scorn the static harmonies of our textbooks. Through a sound training in historical linguistics, the teacher is able to understand and to teach the English language with wisdom and maturity; he knows what English is because he knows how it came to be what it is, and he can glimpse at least dimly what it will be in the future. What he teaches in his classroom must almost necessarily gain in depth, for his instruction will be based not on arbitrary prescriptive pronouncements, but rather upon a thoughtful awareness of English as is, was, and will be. On the other hand, if the teacher turns his back

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*It is with profound gratitude that we again acknowledge the scholarship of Dr. Louis A. Muinzer, Assistant Professor of English at the University of Illinois. In this sequel to "History: the Life in Language," published in the BULLETIN of May, 1960, Dr. Muinzer has condensed research in historical linguistics covering many years. He is imbued with the idea that the principles of linguistics, if properly presented, are within the grasp of secondary school students, and has sought to make language live for them by presenting exercises which they may pursue with profit. It is for us, as teachers of English, to accept the challenge of linguistics which he shares.*



on language history and concentrates exclusively on descriptive techniques, he is like a physiologist who studies dogs' tails by contemplating the tail of a stuffed spaniel. If he looks long enough, he will be able to describe the appendage, but he will have failed to learn the most important truth about a living dog's tail—the fact that it wags. The stuffed spaniel's tail can only tell the researcher that the tail exists; it can tell him nothing about the tail's movement and responsiveness. If a caninologist were to approach his subject in such a fashion, he would quickly be branded a fool. A similar epithet may be applied to any teacher who tries to take the wag out of language.

Historical linguistics, however, is not merely a valuable conditioner of the teacher's attitude; the subject has specific, practical value in the high school and college classroom which has yet been scarcely explored. Because we are primarily engaged in the business of teaching young people to read and to write, we suppose, reasonably enough, that descriptive techniques are our primary linguistic tools. To a great extent, the supposition holds true; if we are to teach our students to use and to understand the language, we must describe for them the basic features of contemporary American English, and, if necessary, drill its salient features into their consciousness. Nevertheless, historical analysis should play an important role in our general English program. Unless each of our students understands the principles of linguistic history, he cannot understand English, and if he cannot understand English, he cannot be expected to write it or read it with much intelligence. Furthermore, if he does not understand our language, he will probably consider his English exercise work a dull concoction of sadistic rules and other spirit-breaking tortures. I am perhaps prejudiced, but I sincerely believe that only historical study can display the vitality, the movement, the strange life of language which makes English worth the learning in the first place. It combats the stuffed-spaniel approach of the extreme descriptivist, whose teaching usually produces stuffed students who write stuffed English. Used imaginatively in the classroom, the historical approach reveals to the student that he *participates* in the English language, that he is the heir of a grand tradition which he must use and enjoy and pass on to his successors. Along with a sense of obligation, the student gains an enjoyment of language study for its own sake—a delight in English which can never be inspired by spelling drills and static grammatical exercises. Only when a student finds such delight in words can he hope to become a successful writer and a perceptive

reader; only when he has experienced the joy of language will he desire to work, to drill and to exercise himself until he has mastered it.

I do not suggest, of course, that descriptive grammar be ignored at the expense of historical analysis; I merely decry the abuse of the former and the rejection of the latter. Historical and descriptive linguistics depend upon one another; they cannot and should not be separated. In practice, the teacher who wishes to put his instruction into historical perspective need not do so at the expense of descriptive study. Rather, he should employ the historical approach as a catalyst, a vitalizing element which gives meaning and direction to the conventional busy-work of English learning. Furthermore, the successful teacher must always stress the *principles* of historical linguistics and never allow his students to become lost in a forest of details. Our young people have enough descriptive data to master without our adding to their burden. Simply learning the orthography of Late Modern English is chore enough for the average teen-ager, and contemporary usage and grammar tax his memory still further. Historical data, therefore, should be made subservient to historical fundamentals, and these fundamentals should always be closely related to the more conventional work of the class.

The principles of language history, if presented in a straightforward fashion, can be grasped by the average thirteen-year-old without great difficulty. The reader of my earlier paper already knows how simple these principles are:

1. The sound, form, and meaning of a language change through both intent and accident.
2. Linguistic change is inaugurated by the individual.
3. Linguistic change flows through ever-widening circles of usage or is checked at some dialect boundary.

To these three principles we may add a generalization based upon the observation of language history:

4. A language at a given time is both a reflection of that time and a link with the past and the future.

That is to say, we speak as we do in 1960 because our language takes the imprint of contemporary life. At the same time, our speech is conditioned by a long linguistic tradition and will itself condition the language of ensuing eras. Historically speaking, language is a tension between the old and the new, the linguistically conservative and the linguistically radical. Stated in human terms, the tension



exists between society as the champion of conservatism and the individual as innovator and rebel. We may represent the conflict graphically as a tug of war between the two opposing forces:

<i>inertia</i>	<i>change</i>
traditional language	contemporary language
society	the individual

The teen-ager who can understand this tension and its underlying principles will not be transformed into a master philologist overnight; he will have learned, however, to look at English from a new and stimulating vantage point: he will have acquired a historical sense. Every new linguistic fact which he learns thereafter will be colored and enriched by Time.

But how is the teacher to bring these principles to life in the classroom? There are many ways to do this, and each teacher must find those methods which are best suited to the academic level and maturity of his own students. There is no sure-fire formula for teaching historical linguistics, and anyone who attempts to find one is not a teacher at all, but merely an Educationalist. In the following pages, I can only outline certain procedures which I have worked out for my own university classes.<sup>2</sup> My students are more advanced than those encountered in the typical high school classroom, and many are teacher-trainees with a special incentive to learn English. On the other hand, a few of them know much more about the principles of linguistic science than the average high school freshman. If I were attempting to adapt the following material for use in pre-college classes, I should make only superficial changes: I should eliminate much of the special terminology used in the exercises, and supply much of the detailed analytic work in our class discussions. For instance, I should expect a high school sophomore to understand the concept of assimilation (Part I below), but I should not expect him to learn of the various kinds of assimilative change: the distinctive varieties of assimilation which could be noted as collected materials interpreted by the group. In sum, I should try to meet the younger student half way, but I should also attempt to challenge his ingenuity and resourcefulness. The experienced high school teacher, however, will know better than I how to modify and to adapt these exercises, which are to be considered merely as suggestions.

The reader should not be discouraged by references in these exercises to dictionaries, periodicals, and other linguistic works which will be found only in a large, well-stocked library. While my own students customarily employ a great many dictionaries and

other linguistic aids in their assignments, not even the great OED is indispensable.<sup>3</sup> The high school teacher should see to it, however, that the library reference shelf contains at least the relatively inexpensive *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* and Waldron's useful little *Dictionary of Americanisms*. Armed with these two works and yesterday's newspaper, the teacher can modify virtually any of the following procedures. Teaching historical linguistics doesn't require a great library; it requires great resourcefulness and imagination.

As space is at a premium, I have not included here any exercises in foreign borrowings, dialectology, place-names, and a number of other historical areas. Rather, I have selected the procedures which stress the basic principles set forth above and in my earlier paper.<sup>4</sup> The exercises in lapses, coinages, and semantics are designed to demonstrate that language changes, that it starts with the innovation of an individual through society like a linguistic disease. The "historical impact" exercise relates language to time. In essence, then, the following exercises deal with the major ingredients of linguistic history: time and change. If a student can successfully grasp these two concepts, he will never again be intimidated by stuffed spaniels.

### I. The Study of Error

The examination of accidental linguistic changes—of lapses, errors or bloopers—serves as an excellent introduction to language history. The subject demonstrates to the student that language is neither infallible nor fixed, that it flows along relentlessly whether we want it to or not. To bring lapses into his classroom, the teacher may distribute a mimeographed outline of possible errors and explain each variety. This outline may be based upon the treatment of lapses by E. H. Sturtevant,<sup>5</sup> though certain of his lapse categories may be conveniently simplified. When each kind of speech lapse has been illustrated and explained in the classroom, the students are sent forth to collect lapses in the speech of their friends and classmates. For this purpose, they are asked to procure a 4 x 6 scratch pad and (writing lengthwise) to record one lapse per sheet. The necessary information is recorded thus:

Type of lapse

Erroneous utterance

Intended utterance

Description of the  
speaker (brief)

Name of collector

In collecting lapses, it is essential that the investigator know



what the speaker *intended* to say; if the speaker does not correct his error and if his intended utterance is not obvious to the collector, he must stop the speaker and question him about the matter. (As Professor Sturtevant was well aware, lapse collecting offers an easy way to break friendships. The collector should be cautioned not to interrupt impetuous individuals who are quick with their fists.) A description of the person making the mistake is also important; his name is immaterial, but his age and background may be of value. The description need not be long-winded, however: "high school history teacher," "four-year-old girl," "elderly Spanish American War veteran who is hard of hearing," or the like will usually suffice. Using the lapse outline, the student has little difficulty in collecting a surprisingly large number of verbal blunders. The exercise teaches him to *hear* language and makes him aware of the rather disturbing fact that his ear is constantly being bombarded by lapses. After a few days as a lapse collector he begins to wonder why language has not changed much more radically than it has since Hengest and Horsa landed in England in 449. If one ten thousandth of all speech lapses committed daily were to catch on in the English language, the senior high school student would not be able to read the themes which he had written four years earlier as a freshman. As the collector wanders along the by-ways of blunder, he becomes conscious of the strong tradition which preserves our language against this constant onslaught; at the same time, he can be made to realize that the relentless pulse of speech innovations is the blood of language, a symbol of its life.

For the teacher who wishes to try the lapse experiment, the following outline may be of assistance. It is based upon the outline which I give to my students, but it incorporates brief definitions of the various varieties of lapse and gives examples of each. A few of the examples are taken from Sturtevant [S] or other specified sources, but the others were collected by my own students.

### An Outline of Speech Lapses <sup>6</sup>

- I. *Assimilation*. Typically, the lapses under this heading involve two sounds (or groups of sounds) which become alike. However, the simple occurrence of a sound out of its proper place in a sequence may also be included under this head. Assimilative lapses fall into two general divisions: those which involve the *anticipation* of a sound before its proper position and those which involve the occurrence of a sound after its natural place in the utterance (*lag*).
- A. *Anticipation*. A sound occurs before its proper position and characteristically replaces a preceding sound. Four varieties of anticipation may be recognized.



1. *Anticipation alone.* A sound is uttered before its proper place, but no other change occurs.

Veryious curious (for "Very curious"). Here, the sound group *-ious* was uttered before it should have been.

2. *Anticipation with substitution.* Here the anticipated sound replaces a sound preceding it. Sometimes the two sounds involved occur side-by-side (as in *assign*, ultimately from Latin *ad* plus *signare*; the *s* was anticipated and substituted for the preceding *d*); this common lapse is called *contact assimilation*.

Shine up for Sheequon (for "Sign up for Sheequon"). The *sh* sound of "Sheequon" has replaced the *s* sound of *sign*. Contrast *Veryious curious* above: there no substitution was involved.

3. *Anticipation with substitution and loss.* Now matters become rather more complicated: the anticipated sound replaces a preceding sound, but is not uttered in its own proper place.

Put my *coat* in your pocket (for "put my cup in your coat pocket") [S]. Here, *coat* is substituted for *cup* and is not uttered in its proper place.

4. *Haplology.* This scholarly name identifies the most amusing of the anticipatory lapses; here, two like sounds are separated in a sequence of sounds; the speaker jumps blithely from one to the other, omitting all intervening sounds. It is as if the tongue had momentarily slipped a cog.

I needly tell you (for "I need hardly tell you"). The speaker has passed from the *d* of *need* to the *d* of *hardly* and has missed entirely the *har* of the latter word.

Batterloo (for "Battle of Waterloo") [S]. The speaker reached the *t* sound of *Battle* and jumped to the same sound in *Waterloo*.

- B. *Lag.* This is the opposite of anticipation. Here, a sound is uttered after its proper place in a sequence and characteristically replaces another sound. We may recognize three kinds of lag.

1. *Lag alone.* A sound is simply repeated after its proper position in an utterance; no other change occurs. Rare.

a wonderful bruy (for "... buy"). The *r* of *wonderful* has lagged.

bushes and treeses (for "bushes and trees") [S]. Contrast "I hate you meeces to pieces," discussed below, p. 10; in that instance, I.A.1. Anticipation alone is involved.

2. *Lag with substitution.* A "lagging" sound replaces a sound following it.

You should have seen Rosie rush (for "... Rosie blush"). The *r* of *Rosie* has replaced the sounds *bl* of *blush*.

3. *Lag with substitution and loss.* A sound is not uttered in its proper place, but is substituted for another, later sound. Very rare.

I alwawe said (for "I've always said") [S]. In this utterance, the *v* sound of *I've* has been omitted in its expected place and has been substituted for the *z* (spelled *s*) of *always*.

- II. *Metathesis.* Sturtevant considers this kind of lapse a variety of assimilation, but it is better to treat it as a separate variety of blunder. In the

case of metathesis, two sounds (or groups of sounds) merely change place.

*Met* some gilk (for "Get some milk"). The first sounds of the first and third words have been switched around.

What *left* is *else* (for "What else is left"). Here, two entire words have changed places.

Students groaning on their beery wenches (for "Students groaning on their weary benches"). This is one of the classic metathesis lapses for which Dr. Spooner of New College, Oxford, was famous; hence the term *Spoonerism* for such errors.

III. *Dissimilation*. This is the opposite of assimilation; two like sounds in an utterance become unlike or one of the two is lost. We may recognize two varieties of dissimilation.

A. *Dissimilation alone*. One of two like sounds disappears.

satistics (for "statistics"). The second and third *t* sounds have caused the first *t* of "statistics" to be omitted.

Bwig Buther is watching you (for "Big Brother"). Notice that two lapses occur here; the loss of the first *r* of *Brother* through the influence of the sound, and the anticipation (I.A.1.) of *w* of *watching* in *bwig*.

B. *Dissimilation with substitution*. In this instance, a new sound is substituted for one of two like sounds.

terrible pest today (for "terrible test today"). The *t* sound of *terrible*, the second *t* of *test* and the *t* of *today* have conspired to undermine the first *t* of *test*. Those who have a knowledge of phonetics will be aware that the voiceless stop *t* has been changed to another voiceless stop, *p*.

tup of coffee (for "cup of coffee").

IV. *Analogy*. This is the easiest to describe and the most difficult to explain of the various lapse types. By analogy, a word is made to conform to some familiar speech pattern. The process may be represented as a proposition: if many words fall into a given pattern, a particular word should fall into it, too. Under this heading falls the phenomenon called *functional shift*, the transformation of one part of speech into another. The following proposition demonstrates how a specimen verb may become a noun: if many verbs (*to hit*, *to run*, etc.) may be used as nouns (a *hit* or a *run* in baseball, for example), then *to slide* may also be used as a noun ("He started his *slide* into second base too late"). For another type of analogic lapse, see the discussion of *dulating* below. There is a short general discussion of analogic change in "History," p. 16. Sturtevant and many of the works in the "History" bibliography discuss the subject at length.

*hersterics* (a three-year-old child's description of a woman's emotions). By analogy with *hysterics* taken to be *his* plus (*s*)*terics*. *deshastuted* (for "exhausted"). A seven-year-old's creation by analogy with numerous *de*-plus-root words in English.

*dulating* ("flat," "level"). Frederick T. Wood, *An Outline History of the English Language* (reprinted, London, 1954), pp. 193-94, reports finding this word in a student's essay. The form is derived analogically from *undulating* (from Latin *unda*, "a wave"). The fledgling writer thought that the *un-* at the beginning of the word was the negative prefix; he reasoned that removal of this



prefix would reverse the meaning of *undulating* and produce a word meaning "not possessing wavy characteristics, i.e., flat." Note that Lapse Type VI. Popular etymology is involved in the error.—Lapses like *dulating* are called *back formations* and are sometimes imitated; see coinage type 3, p. 14.

V. *Contamination*. The blending of two words into one or the substitution of one word in a phrase for another. This error is sometimes due to the association of ideas, but in other instances only a depth psychologist could explain the blunder.

Freudian *sleep* (for "Freudian slip"). The association of Sigmund Freud and dreams perhaps explains this lapse. Possibly the lightly-stressed *i* in *Freudian* may also have been influential; if so Lag with substitution (I.B.2) is involved.

cut across the *yawn* (for "... yard/lawn"). The words *yard* and *lawn* are uttered simultaneously with the ludicrous result noted.  
that little ball *point* man (for "... bald-headed man"). This lapse is linguistically inexplicable. Apparently the speaker was thinking about a ball-point pen. Possibly the gentleman in question possessed a pointed head. Unfortunately the collector either did not possess this phrenological information or else forgot to pass it along.

VI. *Popular etymology*. A change in form due to a faulty analysis of a word's derivation.

flutterby (for "butterfly"). This rearrangement of compound elements crops up occasionally and I recall hearing it in my boyhood. The false analysis supposes metathesis (II. above). The amateur etymologist—and entymologist for that matter—is disturbed by the fact that most butterflies aren't buttery-yellow. He theorizes that the proper name of these fluttery insects should be *flutterby*. The name is such an apt one that poetry is on his side, even if linguistic history must reject his view.

*dulating*. See IV. Analogy above.

VII. *Shortening*. In "History," p. 13, I spoke of the "drum beat" of the English language—the strong stress—which transformed Old English *godum* to *godan*, then *godan* to *gooden* and *goode*, which finally became our modern monosyllable *good*. The weakening and loss of syllables is a kind of lapse, although Sturtevant does not include it in his analysis of error phenomena. Characteristically, the lost syllables are unstressed ones. The following examples from children's pronunciation are found in Robertson and Cassidy, p. 205:

fessor (for "professor")  
spression (for "expression")  
member (for "remember")

When the student has become lapse conscious and has collected his specimens for class discussion, he is ready to begin the second stage of the experiment. Lapse gathering is valuable in itself, but it gains greatly in significance when it is related to the language at large. To make this relation, the teacher may ask his students to submit similar lapses which have "caught on" in their family or

social circle. This assignment demonstrates that speech blunders are sometimes accepted by small groups, who adopt lapses as dialect features. Such catch-ons are particularly likely to occur if the given lapse is inherently amusing or if the perpetrator of the error is a child. As most families use at least a few dialect lapses of this kind, the students have little difficulty in gathering a specimen or two. When they finish collecting their work, they should identify the kind of lapse underlying each catch-on and describe briefly the group which has adopted it; the identity of the originator of the lapse should also be established if this is possible. Here are a few examples of catch-ons submitted by my students:

*kinchin* (for "kitchen"). The orthography suggests that the *t* of "kitchen" has been replaced by an anticipated *n*; however, no sound has been lost, as the reader will hear if he pronounces both forms aloud. The lapse is I.A.1. Anticipation alone. *Kinchin* is the habitual pronunciation of a certain five-year-old boy; the lapse has become a feature of his own personal "dialect."

*Gordean* (for "Gordon Dean"). An excellent example of Lapse Type I.A.4. Haplology. Like the word above, *Gordean* originated in the mouth of a child; unlike *kinchin*, however, *Gordean* became the dialect property of a family group. The collector notes as follows: "My nephew couldn't pronounce his baby brother's name, Gordon Dean. So he shortened it to *Gordean* and now the entire family uses it." Note that the speech of the adults conformed to that of the youngster, not *vice versa*.

*occifer* (for "officer"); *feak* and *weeble* (for "weak and feeble"). Both are examples of III. Metathesis which caught on in different families.

I did it *byself* (for "I did it by myself"). A small child's oft-repeated lapse which became a family saying. The child has skipped from the *y* of *by* to the same sound in *my*. Type I.A.4. Haplology.

The cataloguing of such catch-ons is rendered difficult by the fact that many people who have never heard of Professor Sturtevant *consciously* imitate genuine lapses. Such imitations are actually coinages and should probably be discussed in the next section of the paper, but as they depend upon lapse types it will be convenient to deal with them here. These lapse coinages assume the appearance of genuine blunders, but they are linguistically very sophisticated, and should be separated from true lapses by the student collector. Examples:

*bumb dunny* (for "dumb bunny"). Recorded as a common term in the collector's high school vocabulary; part of "a complete double-talk vocabulary." Cp. my comments on *poke-slow*, in "History, p. 11. The coinage imitates Lapse Type II. Metathesis.

*bookses*, *shoeses* and other double plurals. This inflectional redundancy is habitual at a certain university residence house. The collector



notes: "Possibly this [practice] comes from mice-ses for mice on the 'Huckleberry Hound' [TV cartoon] show which many of the girls watch." The girls are to be commended for their good taste in television entertainment; the "Huckleberry Hound" show is one of the few linguistically significant programs currently on the air, and every philologist should watch it religiously, note pad in hand. Actually, the collector is referring here to a form employed constantly as a personal dialect feature of Mr. Jinks the cat. The form is best represented orthographically by *meeeces* and originates in Jinksey's oft-repeated battle-cry: "I hate you meeces to pieces!" The frustrated and overwrought feline has fallen into Lapse I.A.2. Anticipation with substitution (cp. *pieces*). Jinks was probably influenced as well by Type IV. Analogy, for the radical vowel in *meeeces* seems to echo that in such umlaut plurals as *geese*, and *teeth*. The *ee* of *meeeces* also restores the pre-Great Vowel Shift pronunciation of the *i* of *mice* but this development is probably coincidental; as far as I know, Jinksey has never taken a course in Middle English, and I seriously doubt that he has mastered Renaissance vowel developments on his own.—The residence girls, by following the inflectional pattern of *meeeces*, have created similar forms analogically (Type IV).

**Yank** (for "Yankee"); **confab** (for "confabulation"); **math** (for "mathematics"); **ag** (for "agriculture"); **bus** (for "omnibus"). Such clipped forms are imitations of Lapse Type VII. Shortening, although some of the examples seem to violate the principle of accentuation there set forth. *Yank* and *ag* retain the stressed syllables of the words from which they are derived; *bus* may have developed from the plural *omnibuses* and may therefore represent a stress retention. However, *confab* and *math* (like many other conscious shortenings) have lost the syllables bearing primary stress in the words from which they developed. Such forms as these latter ones appear to be distinctly different from those like the childish *fessor* and *spression*. This difference, I believe, is due to the working of that great shaper of language, analogy. Sophisticated shortenings characteristically retain the first syllable(s) of their original form irregardless of stress; this shortening pattern is based upon the shortening habits of all simple native English words. The first syllable of any Old English word without a prefix is invariably stressed; consequently, the first syllable is the one which is generally retained, although those following it may be weakened or lost. Our example *godum* (with the stressed first syllable) is typical of thousands of Old English forms: there, the accented syllable is retained in our Modern English *good* in the same fashion that the stressed syllable of *professor* is retained in *fessor*. The position of the stress is inconsequential in such developments. However, English-speaking people are accustomed to utter words in which the stress is initial as it is in *godan* and they have come to feel instinctively that the first syllable of *any* shortened form should be retained. When they wish to shorten a word intentionally, they create the clipped form analogically in accordance with the conventional pattern. For further examples and discussion, see Robertson and Cassidy, pp. 204-5, and the Jespersen treatment alluded to there.

Lapse imitations are an interesting study on their own right and may form the basis of separate assignments. In our investigation of error, however, they are merely an interesting side-road. When genuine catch-ons have been collected and catalogued by the students, the teacher can follow the movement of error into even wider circles of usage. He may do this by asking his students to collect mispronunciations and grammatical mistakes which are frequently encountered in sub-standard English; or, for variety, he may compile a list of such blunders himself and jot them on the board for class discussion. Forms of this kind are not the dialect property of a family, a residence hall or a particular high school: they have passed many dialect boundaries and in some cases stand hat-in-hand on the threshold of respectability. The student who has worked through the preceding lapse exercises will have little difficulty with the following forms and many others like them:<sup>7</sup>

*ekscape* (for "escape"). Here we have a very frequent error in pronunciation. The sound of *c* has been uttered before it should have been (Lapse Type I.A.1. Anticipation alone). As in the case of *window seal* discussed above, a second cause of lapse can be perceived here; the *ks* sounds in the erroneous form may also be rendered orthographically by an *x*, hence *exscape*. The lapse, therefore, strongly suggests that it is an analogic one (Type IV): if we say *explode*, *expand* and the like, the lapse asks us, why then shouldn't we say *exscape*? The resultant form is a delightful one, for it literally sets the poor word back several thousand years. It restores the historically accurate Latin prefix *ex-* which had developed into *es-* in Norman French *escaper*, the form borrowed by the English.

*ekcetera* (for "et cetera"). This lapse is common, particularly in the speech of those who do not understand the Latin. An instance of Type III. Dissimilation; cp. *t* of *cetera*.

*Febuary* (for "February"). Of the lapses cited here, *Febuary* easily has the best chance to become standard usage; despite the efforts of English teachers this form is heard everywhere. Another example of Type III. Dissimilation; cp. the second *r*.

*heightth* (for "height"). Analogy (Type IV) with *breadth*.

Where did you go *to*? (for "Where did you go?" and "What place did you go to?"). In this case, two clauses have been blended together; and example of Lapse Type V. Contamination. Such utterances (noted by Sturtevant) are particularly frequent in the speech of children.

To demonstrate the final stage in the progression from lapse to respectability, the teacher should provide his students with a list of lapses which have gained acceptance in standard English usage. Here, the possible examples are legion, but a very few must suffice.



*mice* (for "mouses"). See "History," p. 10 and n. 18, for a brief discussion of i-umlaut, a vastly significant variety of lapse; Type I.A. 2. Anticipation with substitution.

*bird* (for Old English "bridd"), and *ask* (from Old English "acsian"). Two examples of Type II. Metathesis.

*helped* (for Old English "healp"/"hulpon"). The past tense of this and many other strong verbs have been made to conform to the familiar weak verb pattern; Type IV. Analogy.

*penthouse* (misinterpretation of "pentus" or "pentis" from French "appentis"). In the pre-twentieth-century sense of "lean-to," this word was thought to be related to "house." Another instance of Popular Etymology (Type VI).

*brunch* (combination of "breakfast" and "lunch"). This useful word is an *imitation* of Lapse Type V. Contamination.

An examination of the etymologies in any collegiate dictionary, or a reading of Sturtevant, Robertson and Cassidy, etc., will provide hundreds of other instances of lapses which have made good in our language. By examining the boner background of contemporary speech, the student acquires a feeling for the dynamic changes which are constantly reshaping English. He learns to relate the speech heard by his ear to the speech heard by the ears of men living a millennium before his own birth. He learns that language has its own life, and that it uses men as much as men use it. In fine, he puts language in a test tube and watches it react when warmed by the Bunsen burner of human blunder as he follows it through the following progression:

Individual error  
Catch-on usage  
Widespread usage  
Standard usage

On each of these four levels, he has found the same lapse principles at work; he has seen error born on the tongue of the individual speaker and come to maturity in the accepted locutions of his textbooks. The only drawback to these exercises lies in the fact that they have a rather fatalistic cast: man likes to think that he wields some control over his language, that he consciously shapes it to his needs and aspirations. To some extent, man does control his language, and the study of lapse should never be allowed to conceal this fact from the student. Consequently, the preceding exercises should be assigned in conjunction with the coinage exercises which follow.

## II. The Study of Intentional Innovations

Coinage exercises are easily set up and prove both amusing and informative. Through them, the teacher may demonstrate

that change in language is frequently dominated by the human will and that the movement of language is not entirely a matter of chance and error. If he wishes, the teacher can follow through the classic progression from individual innovation, catch-on, and widespread usage to general acceptance; such a set of exercises would be identical with those plotted for the study of lapses with one fundamental difference; here, only intentional innovations are to be considered. In *History: the Life in Language*, pp. 16-17, I carried the hypothetical coinage *chookies* through these stages of development and shall not repeat myself here. After examining the case history of *chookies* and the methodology used in the lapse assignments, the interested teacher will be able to work out similar coinage exercises without difficulty. For variety of procedure I have used the following exercise, which enables the student to examine the forces which underscore the coining of new words and phrases.

First, the class discusses the latest social developments which bear upon their personal experience. On the basis of this discussion, the group decides upon some gap in their vocabulary which needs filling. It may be that a new dance step needs a name, or that some development in hot-rod racing has outstripped the English language. At the other end of the cultural scale, a recent trend in science, politics, or diplomacy may call for new terminology. When teacher and students have decided upon one specific vocabulary gap, the class then coins a word to fill it. Coinages may be created in the following ways:<sup>8</sup>

1. A non-traditional combination of sounds is composed; e.g., *kodak*, *dacron*.
2. Traditional elements may be joined together in one of two ways: prefixes and suffixes may be joined to a basic root (*forward* [prefix *for-* plus *ward*], *truthfulness* [*truth* plus suffixes *-ful* and *-ness*]), or basic roots (or words) may be joined together (*baseball*, *white-collar worker*).
3. A lapse may be imitated; see above, pp. 10-11. An interesting group of lapse imitations are the *back-formations*: a word is "incorrectly" analyzed and the supposedly basic word element becomes a new word, frequently an amusing or bantering one; e.g., *buttle* from *butler* and *sculp* from *sculptor*; see the discussion of *undulating*, under Lapse Type IV. Analogy. Examples of intentional *functional shift* (e.g., the verb *to sandwich* from the noun), metathesis imitations (cf. *dumb bunny*) and copies of other blunder patterns are not infrequent.
4. A foreign word may be Anglicized; e.g. *beef* (from the French), *dinghy*, (*dingy* or *dingey*), a small boat (from the Bengali), *buffalo* (from the Portuguese or Italian). When a word is consciously



adopted and adapted from a foreign language, such a *loanword* is best viewed as a kind of "English coinage."

5. A sound may be imitated; e.g., *zoom*, *meow*, *gong* (from the Javanese and/or Malay, but originally a coinage of this variety).
6. The initial letters of a group of words may be combined to form a new word; each letter may be pronounced individually (*CIO*, *GOP*) or together like a conventional word (*snafu*). Some (like *AWOL*) may be pronounced in either fashion. Coinages of this kind are called *acronyms*.
7. A group of sounds may be repeated with or without variation; e.g., *blow-blow* (campus slang for a noisy hair dryer); *killer-diller*; *ping-pong*.

Notice that Type 4 accounts for many of the words traditionally called *loanwords*; from the viewpoints of a given language, words consciously adopted from foreign sources have the force of coinages. On the other hand, some borrowed words have the force of lapses and represent contaminations of English utterances: a borrowing like *they* from the Old Norse was probably not intentional; the form probably "slipped" into the speech of Englishmen who lived side-by-side with Scandinavians in the Middle Ages (Lapse Type V. Contamination). One is also wise to keep in mind that many apparent coinages are simply semantic developments; thus, the word *Charleston* was not coined to provide a name for the uproarious dance of the 1920's; rather, the existing name of a city in South Carolina changed in meaning. On the other hand, the verb *to macadamize* is a genuine coinage, although it too is based upon a proper noun, the name of the engineer John McAdam; here, an existing word has been modified by the addition of a suffix (see 2 above).

When the class has carefully created its coinage and has mastered its definition, the students should then be instructed to introduce the word in their other classes and in their social circle as opportunity affords. After two weeks, they should be required to submit a written report on the success of their efforts. In this report, they should indicate how readily the coinage met acceptance and to what extent it was reject. They should also try to determine what kind of individuals were most willing to accept and use the coinage without challenge, and conversely, what types scorned it with the simple pronouncement that "There's no such word!" The results of this experiment are as unpredictable as life itself, and my materials are not yet sufficient to enable me to draw any scholarly conclusions. I would suppose, however, that a great number of case histories would demonstrate that the success of a coinage depends upon one or more of the following factors:<sup>9</sup>

1. *The usefulness of the coinage.* Obviously, if there is the need for a

term in either a specialized vocabulary or in the general language, a coinage meeting that need has an excellent chance to gain acceptance. An avid bridge player in one of my classes (a gentleman old enough to know better) devised a new bridge term in the course of our coinage studies and introduced it in a circle of his fellow-addicts; as the coinage expressed some hitherto unnamed maneuver, it has an excellent chance to catch on in bridge circles. Many of the most successful coinages fill similar vocabulary blanks; consider *brunch*, *Van Allen Rings*, *Beat Generation*.

2. *The value of the coinage as a rejuvenator of dead verbiage.* Through overuse, words wear out and become colorless. Consequently, our more lively individuals and groups are constantly coining new words to revitalize their speech. Words denoting emotional and esthetic responses tend to be the most easily exhausted and are satisfying only to linguistic dullards; *good*, *bad*, *attractive*, *pretty*, *nice*, and *terrible* are familiar examples of the class. The underworld language of the high school corridor and the army barracks is laden with coinages designed to convey human responses with greater vividness than these tired words; a few examples must suffice: *disha* (campusesese for "neat," "terrific"); *zorch* ("chic," "sharp," in good taste"; recorded in high school usage in California and Illinois); *fubar* (World War II acronym for "fouled up beyond all recognition").
3. *The symbolic value of the coinage as a social identifier.* The desire to band into a group has led mankind down two paths. When it has caused man to pool his strengths, that desire has created civilization. When it has caused men to pool their weaknesses, it has produced the rabble, the mob, the snobbish elite, the herd of racial and religious bigots, bogus social and "intellectual" organizations, and, pathetically enough, the high school and college clique. Such groups as the latter appear to develop special words which identify the user as an insider; these dialect forms are difficult to distinguish from words in the preceding paragraph, for they are characteristically bright and possibly imaginative. They proclaim that the users "belong." On a larger scale, the population of an entire high school may develop such coinages to stress the unity of youth in an alien, adult society. Consider *bumb dunny*, the lapse imitation previously cited, part of a "complete" high school double-talk vocabulary; such a vocabulary is a trademark or a symbol. Consider also the double plurals like *bookses* which were used in a certain girls' residence hall. Were these not badges of membership? The study of this lapse factor is a subtle and difficult one; the linguist, however, must not ignore it for that reason.
4. *The value of the coinage as a means of ego gratification.* A coinage can identify members of a group, but it can also train the spotlight on individuals who are "in the know." The coiner of a new word or the person who introduces a coinage into his special group can give himself a mental pat on the back. Certain columnists make a fetish of such coinages; earnest young college English majors pick up the latest high-sounding terms of the "best" critics and pompously mouth them; a high school student visits a friend in another town and returns home with the latest slang to spring on his or her

classmates. Such ego-boasting is so common that none of us have failed to practice it on occasion. A striking example of such activity was recorded by a student of mine in the course of a coinage exercise. One evening when she was dining with a group of her friends, this young lady worked a pre-arranged coinage into the conversation. A skeptic immediately asked her what the word meant; before she could reply, another girl at the table (with an undoubted feeling of superiority) attempted to define the word!

5. *The prestige of the coiner.* If the creator (or promoter) of a coinage is a highly respected individual, his prestige may be transferred to his linguistic off-spring. Probably, a given coinage will have better chances of success if it comes from his lips or pen than if it is the handiwork of an undistinguished or dull individual. When a Winston Churchill speaks, the English language listens; when Hiram Smith, the D-minus rhet student, comes off with a "good one," not even his mother pays any attention. It is the dynamic student leader who will coin the local *New Frontiers*, or *Iron Curtain*; and it is the corridor wit who will hold the students' attention, even if he has to create the word first as Chaucer apparently did. I have watched with amusement the triumphs of several "prestige figures" in my own classes, particularly those of a popular campus columnist, and an ordained minister.
6. *The size of the audience exposed to the coinage.* The campus columnist mentioned in the last paragraph planted a coined word one day in his column; I have no idea how many University of Illinois undergraduates happened to read the column that day, but five hundred would seem to be a conservative estimate. On the other hand, most coinages do not receive such a wide initial audience: the coiner may toss off his new word at a small social gathering, at the dinner table, or in the course of a private discussion with a single individual. Obviously, a few of the columnist's five hundred readers are likely to pick up a striking new term, at least temporarily; of these few, perhaps one or two will come to use it habitually and pass the coinages on to his friends. However, the odds against the adoption of a coinage heard by, let us say, a dozen people are great. The more ears and eyes that are exposed to a new word, the better its chances of success in the world. In the present era of rapid communication, the coinage of some prominent individual is flashed from coast to coast with incredible speed. Taking advantage of this accelerated word movement, the Madison Avenue "depth" men are bombarding the American citizenry with an array of coinages that are quite literally brainwashed into the general vocabulary (e.g., *auto-home*, *flip-top box*, *tired blood*, *filter blend*). At least, the introduction of such words illustrates the response of a large audience to frequently-repeated coinages.

In the discussion of the class coinage reports, the teacher should relate the students' findings to the factors sketched out briefly above. If the coinage has been an apt one, it may continue its career indefinitely in the speech of the school. To take note of any continued growth, the teacher may instruct the class to report on any occurrence of the term which is spotted throughout



the rest of the semester. Even if the coinage does not catch on, however, the exercise illustrates ably how new words are born and how people respond to them. Ideally, it would be better if each student, as individual innovator, coined his one word and promoted its acceptance on his own; concerted group action, however, focuses the attention on a single linguistic experiment and enables the students to share and compare their coinage experiences. Also, group action approximates the conditions of mass communication; it causes the coinage to be broadcast extensively and often, and will probably yield more interesting results. When the reports have been submitted and discussed, the teacher can spot those students who have acquired a historical sense by asking a simple question: "Doesn't our group coinage prove conclusively that linguistic change need not be inaugurated by an individual?" If there is a budding Karl Luick in the class, he will quickly point that the "group" hasn't coined anything: it was Hetty Jones in the third row who concocted the coinage which the group *accepted* because it seemed useful (Factor 1) or vivid (Factor 2), or because half the boys in the class have a crush on Hetty and hang on her every word (Factor 5); he might well add that Pamela Green and Theophilus Johnson probably spoke out on behalf of the coinage because the word sounded too difficult for most of their friends to understand and would enable them to show off their superior learning (Factor 4). Also, the analyst should not forget little Sally Saucer who sits in the middle seat of the middle row. With happy tears in her eyes little Sally voted for the coinage which the class as a group seemed to like so well; she likes to "share things" with people; that always makes her feel she "really belongs." Sally is suffering from an advanced case of Factor 3. So much then for "group coinage."

In concluding this section of the paper, let me caution the teacher never to permit useless and vapid coinages to be used for experimental purposes. Of all people the language historian should never contribute to the existing stock of verbal deadwood. The teacher should, moreover, always see to it that his students approach the coinage assignment in the right spirit. The study of coinage is a thoroughly enjoyable pursuit, but it should not be handled as a practical joke on unwary "subjects." Its purpose is not to make fools of acquaintances, but rather to understand them linguistically. If anyone asks a student about the class coinage, the student should freely admit the word in question is an innovation. It is probably wise, however, to disassociate the English teacher himself from the experiment. His prestige, or lack of

prestige, will undoubtedly influence the potential user of the coined word.

For more far-ranging study in the coinage field, the teacher may ask the class to examine the coinages which grew out of some cultural or scientific development in the past: the rebirth of Classical learning in the Renaissance, the invention of the airplane, the rise of jazz or any of a hundred other topics may be used. The coinages generated by such developments will be largely of the utilitarian variety, but are frequently very vivid for all that. Consider, for example, such airplane coinages as *tailspin*, *to zero in*, *to hedgehop*, *powerdive*, and *ack-ack*. It is also interesting to examine coinages specifically designed to rejuvenate the mother tongue. To accomplish this, ask the class to submit lists of the slang coinages used by their own social group and then compare these coinages with those used by students in the past; glossaries of hoary college slang are cited in Mencken's *American Language*, p. 569, n. 2, and its second supplement, p. 712, n. 2. See also pp. 172-202 of Maurice H. Weseen, *A Dictionary of American Slang* (New York, 1934). For other assignments, Baugh's *History*, Robertson and Cassidy, and the historical dictionaries will provide much material on coinages and offer many suggestions.

### III. The Study of Semantic Change

The first two sections of this paper have dealt with the "outside" of language, its sounds and forms and its word-stock. In the present section, we shall deal with the meanings of words, the science of semantics. The nature of meaning is one of the most exacting and subtle of researches, and yet one of the most important subjects which a young mind can investigate. The boy or girl who understands only semantics is better equipped to deal with this world than the young person who knows only physics or chemistry or mathematics. The historical linguist, however, is not concerned directly with the ramifications of this all-important subject. He devotes his attention to one special area of semantic study, the complex phenomena of semantic change, the never-ending development of word meanings.

The study of semantic change in our own language has been greatly simplified by the publication of the OED, the AED and the DA, which trace the meanings of a given word in its historical sequence. With such lexicographical aids, the teacher may devise numerous exercises without the slightest difficulty. To make the student's work meaningful, however, the teacher must provide his

students with an outline analysis of semantic change, and must explain and illustrate each variety of change in the classroom. The following outline embodies the traditional treatment of the subject. Similar presentations will be found in Potter, Greenough and Kittredge, Robertson and Cassidy, and Hixson and Colodny. Many of my illustrations are taken from these works.

### Kinds of Semantic Change

1. *Generalization*. The meaning of a word moves from the special to the general.  
*dog*: originally "a canine of ancient breed," but now "any canine."  
*manuscript*: originally "a hand-written copy," but now "a non-printed copy, either hand-written or typed."
2. *Specialization*. The meaning of a word moves from the general to the special, the particular.  
*starve*: originally "to die," but now "to die from hunger."  
*girl*: originally "a young male or female" (Middle English), but now "a young female."
3. *Degradation*. The meaning of a word is debased and deprived of its former dignity.  
*dame*: originally "a woman of station," but now a flippant, disrespectful epithet for a woman.  
*lust*: originally "pleasure," but now "taboo physical passion."
4. *Elevation*. The meaning of a word is raised in dignity.  
*minister*: originally "a servant," but now "a clergyman" or "a high government official."  
*bum*: generally "a (drunken) loafer," but a term of endearment in Brooklyn when *dem Bums* "was" playing at Ebbett's Field.
5. *Concretization*. The meaning of a word moves from abstract to concrete.  
*honor*: originally "esteem paid to worth," etc., but now also "a judge" (his Honor).  
*fastness*: first recorded in Old English in the sense "the state of being firmly fixed," but about a century later it had gained the meaning "fortress, stronghold."
6. *Abstraction*. The meaning of a word moves from concrete to abstract.  
*heart*: originally "an organ of the body," but now also "courage, fortitude." (Cp. the song "You've Got to Have Heart.")  
*lemon, false alarm, blank cartridge*: in addition to their usual meanings, these words are slang expressions for "disappointment."
7. *Radiation*. A number of independent meanings develop or radiate from one central meaning of a word.  
*head*: originally "the top part of the human body containing the brain," but from this sense have radiated out many distinctive meanings; some of these are the following: "the side of a coin bearing the representation of a head;" "an in-



dividual" (usually in the plural: a hundred head of cattle); "the upper end of something" (the head of a bed); "a director or leader" (the head of the department); "the foam on a glass of beer;" "the membranal striking surface of a drum;" "a toilet" (Navy lingo). Other meanings could easily be added to the list; most of them signify "that which is at the top."

8. *Euphemism*. A word of neutral meaning comes to signify an idea which is too unpleasant, vulgar, or shocking for direct statement.

*to pass away*: the self-explanatory merged verb has come to mean "to die."

*to make love*: this romantic idiom has come to mean "to have sexual relations."

9. *Hyperbole*. The meaning of a word is weakened by the extravagant application of the word to an object which is unworthy of it.

*magnificent*: originally "splendid, exalted, noble," but of little force now as it is applied to everything from a necktie to a good two-iron shot in golf.

*glorious*: once this word suggested "that which is supremely praiseworthy, resplendent;" now it suggests very little indeed; "a glorious time" may refer simply to a fairly pleasant experience, and a "glorious suntan" may indicate nothing more than "a somewhat discolored back which doesn't peel."

10. *Popular Etymology*. An erroneous analysis of the word leads to a shift in its meaning. Compare Lapse Type VI., where such analysis leads to a change in form.

*pantry*: this Old French borrowing has as its basic element the word *pain*, "bread," from Latin *panis*. Most people would relate the word to the native English *pan* and consider a *pantry* a place where pans (not bread) are stored.

*penthouse*: discussed above as a lapse and repeated here to illustrate the fact that popular etymology can change meaning and form simultaneously.

11. *Transference*. The meaning of a word can shift from subject to object or *vice versa*.

*curious*: this adjective was originally applied to a person (subject), i.e., "a curious (inquisitive) person," but it came to be applied to objects; Shakespeare uses the word in its transferred sense in "a curious (care-demanding) business" and in "a curious (elaborately wrought) tale." Today the transferred meaning of the word perhaps approximates "strange;" "a curious tale or business" means a "strange, inexplicable or mysterious" one.

*straightforward*: in contrast to *curious*, this adjective originally applied to an object, i.e., "straightforward (direct) language," and was transferred to a subject: "a straightforward (frank, direct) person."

This conventional presentation of semantic change is convenient, if not absolutely satisfactory. When the outline fails the teacher,

he should not try to force a given development into one of the categories presented above. He should simply explain that the outline catalogues many changes in word meaning, but that it cannot explain them all. I am convinced that, in time, a better analysis of semantic change can be worked out. To a great extent, semantic change is metaphorical and the ultimate scheme of its permutations will have to deal directly with figurative expression. The suds floating on a glass of beer is like the head of a man; the handwritten copy of Virgil is like the typed draft of a Graham Greene novel; the heart, an organ, symbolizes a quality in man. The mind is constantly groping for fresh associations as it modifies the meanings of words. Semantic change is mankind's way of being a poet, the transformation of everyday communication into art. It is a vivid reminder that while facts may be eternal, man's imaginative perception of facts is temporal and always changing. Ideally, then, an ideal analysis of semantic change will mirror the imaginative, poetic impulses which underly so much of meaning development.

In teaching this area of linguistic history, the teacher should again stress the importance of the individual. Meaning is a much more elusive entity than form or sound, but it is changed by the convolutions of the solitary human mind. When a single intellect plants new meaning in a group of sounds, that meaning may travel through ever-broadening social rings like a coinage or a lapse. Using the outline as a general guide, the teacher may ask his students to examine semantic change as it passes through various stages from innovation to general usage. For variety, attention may be focused on the semantic activity of particular persons, fields of activity or groups. Here are a few such semantic hunting-grounds arranged according to growth stage:

#### 1. *Individual innovation.*

*The speech of a given child* provides many instances of semantic change, notably of type 1. Generalization: *dad* may mean "any man" and *dog* may signify "any animal."

*The language of a given poem* is a mine of semantic developments, that is, if the poem has any genuine literary merit. Skillful poets frequently alter the meanings of words by placing them in carefully prepared verse contexts. No dictionary can tell the reader precisely what these words mean in various poems by W. B. Yeats: *swan*, *gyre*, *tower*, *rose*, or the name *Leda*. Other recent poets whose work displays great semantic richness are Father Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, e. e. cummings, and Wallace Stevens. If less complex poets are more in keeping with the literary background of the class, simpler works will provide ample material. As suggested above, there is an intimate bond between metaphor and semantic change. If a poet writes "My love is a lichen," he has modified the meaning of both *love* and *lichen*. While the critic may say that the

poet has here "created an image," the linguist may observe with greater accuracy that the writer has engaged in semantic manipulation.

## 2. *Catch-on usage.*

*The slang of a given high school or college clique* is rife with semantic innovations as well as with coinages. One amusing example submitted by one of my students may stand for them all, the use of the term *All Star* to signify an undesirable male date. Originally, the compound modified object-nouns: "an all-star movie production," "an all-star football game." The term then came to signify "a person who plays in an all star game." ("Joe Clunk was an *all-star* back in 1949.") In this sense, *an all star* has probably taken on the connotations of manliness, strong-hearted American vigor, and heroism. As used by a coed to mean "a masculine wash-out," the word has fallen on its semantic face; a delightful example of Semantic Change Type 3. Degradation.

*The language of a given family* offers many instances of semantic development. Names of food, family activities, relatives, etc., will yield material if studied carefully. For instance, *a ride* or *a drive*, "an automobile outing," may mean something else to Mom and the kids when Dad says, "Let's all go for a ride this afternoon." To them, it may mean "a ride down those dull backroads which Dad insists on driving down." (Semantic Change Type 3. Degradation). The verb *to tidy up* probably has a different meaning in every family, a meaning which depends upon Mom's standards of domestic cleanliness. In the sentence "I made soup for dinner tonight," *soup* often has a specialized meaning (Type 2); it perhaps signifies "the same old bean soup that I've been dishing up for the last twenty years." Euphemisms (Type 8) for toilet terms are as varied as they are, shall we say, vivid.

## 3. *Widespread usage.*

*The shop-talk or technical vocabulary of a craft or profession* will provide the student with semantic developments which have become fixed in the language of large groups of people. The possible areas of investigation include plumbing, carpentry, printing, banking, the law, fashion designing, and even "the art and sullen craft" of poetry, which has its own technical vocabulary. Trade magazines are helpful in such work, but "field trips" to shop and office are even more valuable. Students should not be encouraged in the belief that English research can be done only in the library. It is interesting to observe that a given word may undergo semantic development in two or more separate activities: *panel*, for instance, means one thing in the shop-talk of an aviator, another thing in the vocabulary of a photographer, and still another in the terminology of a dressmaker. Similarly, if a geologist, a gymnast, and an underworld hoodlum were to hold a symposium on their venerable professions, the word *dip* causes some confusion as each has endowed it with a specialized meaning. The two words cited are typical of the numerous common English words which have changed semantically through contact "men at work."<sup>10</sup>

*The dialect of a given locale* offers a greater challenge to the student of semantics, but is very rewarding. The dialect area should be kept small, the county or region of the state in which the students live. They may be asked to search for fairly common words which have distinctive meanings in the area specified. Examples: *to look* means "to stem" ("to look the berries") in Jackson County, Illinois; *nurse*, noun, occasionally



means "mother's milk" in the Ozarks of southwestern Missouri and northwestern Arkansas; in parts of West Virginia, *fruit* may mean "applesauce." Wentworth's dialect dictionary offers many instances of such developments.

#### 4. General usage.

*Words selected at random* from standard speech, newspapers, magazines, etc., may be examined in the light of their semantic histories. These histories may be worked out easily through reference to the OED, the DAE and the DA. I shall purposely refrain from making specific suggestions; half the delight of semantic study lies in hitting upon the strange gyrations of meaning on one's own. An old teacher of mine loved to speak of "the antics of semantics" and his phrase is an apt one indeed. *The semantics of a popular activity* may be spotlighted. General developments in meaning may be profitably approached through a study of the "great American pastimes"—golfing, politicking, missile-racing, club-joining, drinking, *et al.* Any activity of general popularity will suffice. When examined from a semantic point of view, such an activity will provide many distinctive meaning developments. For instance, politicking exhibits countless semantic changes. *Lincoln*, "the name of the Civil War president of the United States," means in political speeches "the inherent glory of the Republican Party." On the other hand, *Jefferson*, "the name of an early American, thinker, statesman, inventor, and architect," means in rival political speeches "the sanctity of the Democrats." (Both perversions exemplify Semantic Change Type 1. Generalization; they suggest that every Republican is a Lincoln and that every Democrat is a Jefferson.) In some instances, politicians of both parties agree semantically. As the words roll from their silvery tongues, *The American Way*, *Freedom*, and *Liberty* mean merely "what you'll get if you vote for me." (Instances of Type 9. Hyperbole.)

In this series of assignments, notice that we have come full cycle: the little child who calls every man *Dad* is semantically identical with those who call every man *Jefferson* or *Lincoln*. The difference lies in the fact that the child is an individual, while the proponents of the political developments are legion. Semantic change, then, moves in ever-widening circles like change in sound or form, but it is more subtle than either, for it exists in the human mind and leaves no tangible sign. It is the most subtle because it is the fundamental feature of language. Millennia ago, man discovered the certain sounds which he made had meaning; if he had never gone on to build a skyscraper or concoct an atomic bomb, he would have proclaimed himself a man by this one conscious discovery. After his creation of semantics, he discovered that semantically oriented groups of sounds (words) could be related to one another, and thereby he invented grammar. Finally, he discovered that grammatically organized words possessed power and beauty; thus he created literature. The great language families and the great treasures of poetry and prose which man has shaped since those early times are complex and awe-inspiring, but they are no more

eloquent than the miraculous joining of sound and sense which was their beginning.

In conducting the exercises, the teacher may parcel out individual projects to individual students; for instance, in the study of semantic change at the usage level, a different craft or profession might be assigned to each student who would then conduct a personal investigation. Frankly, I believe that a group project is bound to be more profitable than such piecemeal work. A teacher's job, granted, is to develop the individual personality and abilities of each young person entrusted to his care; however, a class—a group of young individualists—is not merely an educational convenience. Our class system is dedicated to the proposition that students can teach each other. I prefer, therefore, assignments which promote the pooling and interchange of information in the classroom. I suggest that all of the students in the class focus attention on a given occupation, and that they use the class as a gathering house for their individual efforts. If the data each acquires is written on those ever-faithful 4 x 6 scratch pad slips, a class file may be kept and if this "scratch dictionary" covers the semantics of an unusual or inadequately explored area in our vocabulary, there is no reason why it shouldn't be composed into a formal glossary and submitted to *Word Study*, *American Speech*, or some other worthy publication. The teacher or one of the better writers in the class may add a preface explaining that the materials for the work were gathered by the members of the class specified. My own students always respond best to an experiment when I suggest that their researches may make an original and publishable contribution to our knowledge of language. Such group projects are nicely balanced by those which are almost necessarily individual enterprises, the study of the semantics of a single family, for example.

#### IV. The Linguistic Impact of History

In the previous exercises, we have considered dominant ways in which language changes. With the principles set forth, the teacher and his students should be able to meet any specific historical development, any change in form, sound or meaning. If the various categories and classifications fail to yield a perfect description of some specific change, the investigator should be charitable in his criticism; no one will ever claim to provide an infallible analysis of linguistic change. I hope, however, that the great majority of the problems which the investigator will encounter have been dealt with either directly or by implication in the foregoing pages. In any

event, the reader should be ready at this point to bring all the preceding data to bear upon a given historical event in the biography of our mother tongue. He should be prepared now to view English at a particular moment in its history and to observe the varied forces which move it onward.

To observe the interplay of language and history, the teacher will be wise to introduce his class to the era in which they live. The following procedure suggests one way to do this.

During the course of the semester, the teacher watches the social and political news carefully in search of an event which will capture the imagination of the country. As language is a reflex of events, such an occurrence—a catastrophe, a scientific discovery, a diplomatic crisis, a national election—will start tongues wagging at once. When the teacher has spotted the history-making event he has been searching for, he sends his young linguists into the field armed as usual with their trusty 4 x 6 pads to record the vocabulary of history. The students should be instructed to devour newspapers, magazines, conversations, signs, radio and television programs, and any other sources of current language at their disposal. Wherever new words are being generated, they should poke their philological noses, collecting and recording data. After a specified period of time, two weeks to a month, they should submit their data slips, along with any relevant newspaper clippings which they have accumulated. The assembled material is then sifted, discussed and analyzed by the class.

During the past few years, I have used this exercise with what I consider great success. In this span, two events overshadowed all rivals as language generators, one tragic and one comic, though both seemed rather tragic at the time. These horrendous events were the orbiting of the Sputnik satellite by the Russians, (October 4, 1957), and the launching of the sack dress by certain infamous Parisian designers (spring, 1958). Both events hit America where it lived. For the time, Sputnik undermined the Yankee's pride in his technological know-how, while Dior and fellow conspirators completed the demoralization of the land by proclaiming that the Form Divine would no longer exist—that, after all, Venus di Milo *was* shaped like a silo. As these historic happenings unleashed their diabolic energies on the American public, my students recorded two new chapters in the saga of American English. To deal adequately with either body of data is impossible here; of the two, the Sputnik data is the more significant and far-reaching. This data will merge with the larger linguistic chapter dealing with space-age English—a chapter which is just beginning. The following list



includes some of the most characteristic and revealing of the Sputnik words recorded by my students:

### Portrait of the Language as a Young Satellite

#### 1. *Sputnik* words

##### a. Nouns with the suffix *-nik* referring to satellites.

*Bottlenik* (news magazine pun on *bottleneck*; the awaited U. S. satellite)

*Mutnik* (dog-bearing satellite; general usage)

*Sudsnik* (hoax satellite made from washing machine tub; national photo service caption)

*Planetnik, Whatnik* (newspaper names for the Russian satellite)

##### b. Nouns with *-nik* referring to other objects and concepts.

*Pumpnik* ("Halloween jack-o-lantern" alluded to in a Chicago newspaper)

*Stompnik* ("a dance or informal party" advertised in a sign on a bulletin board)

*Whatnik* ("name of future church program at University Baptist Student Foundation;" cp. the same word in the section above.)

*Talknik* (conference of Krushchev and Mao; campus newspaper headline.)

##### c. *Sputnik* as a verb.

###### I. "to surpass," "to beat"

"If we don't watch out Russia will sputnik us in education."

(Teacher in a college class)

"sputniked" ("bested by someone else")

###### II. "to reach preeminence"

"He sputniked to the top of his field." (Conversation)

"Russia sputniked its way into the lead [in the missile race]."

(Newspaper)

###### III. "to move like a sputnik"

"I kept sputniking around." ("whirling around"; used by a college girl)

"In a few years we will all 'sputnik' from place to place."

(Newspaper letter)

##### d. *Sputnik* as an adjective.

*sputnik flu* (Used in a newsreel "in reference to the new vigor of some American test pilots.")

*Sputnik Sundae* (An "out-of-this-world" concoction according to a drugstore sign.)

The few words listed above can only suggest the impact of a single word, *Sputnik*, upon our language: the effect of the satellite's launching reached far beyond such limitations. Sputnik made Americans space conscious; man-made moons, rocketry, space exploration became the topics of everyday conversation. It will be twenty or thirty years before we can look objectively at our new space language and assess its contribution to the hard core of

English. When we do so, we shall find that the Sputnik affair has a significant place in the gallery of language-making events.<sup>11</sup>

The "Sack Look," on the other hand, will probably occupy no such position. As this fashion is already a lost cause and a dead issue, the student may view its verbal activities with the eye of history. Like many another chapter in the saga of English, the story of the sack is an amusing one and may serve as a healthy contrast to more solemn areas of investigation. A sense of humor is essential equipment for all who would consider themselves language historians. English is very much like Maggie in *What Every Woman Knows*: anyone who has ever loved her has had to laugh at her first. She is an absurd and delightful lady, this language; one minute she is humming the melodies of a Shakespeare; the next, she is uttering the grave thoughts of a Locke. But when we think we have finally come to understand her, she bounces in, clad in a chemise and does a pratfall or two to destroy our cherished illusions. If one would know the English language, he must come to enjoy her pratfalls as well as her beauty and her wisdom. Here, then, are a few examples of one of her many comic interludes.

#### Abridged Dictionary of Applied Sackology

1. *Chemise*, noun. French borrowing. A loose, unbelted dress which transforms the female form into a not-very-classical column.
  - a. Adjectives formed from *chemise*.
    - chemisable* ("a moderately chemisable figure")
    - chemisey* (recorded by four collectors)
  - b. Other nouns based on *chemise*.
    - chemiserie* (accessories to be worn with the *chemise*)
    - cheniseness* (apparently "the state of being [like] a *chemise*")
    - chemisette* ("a modified *chemise*")
    - che-moo* (The coinage of a [male] college student: "It's not *chemise*, it's *che-moo* for *shmoos* . . ." This inspired form is either an imitation of Lapse Type VI, Popular etymology, or of V, Contamination [a blend of *chemise* and *shmoos*].)
  - c. *Chemise* as a verb; two occurrences of this verb reveal semantic differences: "I've been had ought to be replaced with I've been *chemised*." ". . . effort to *chemise* the country is comparable only to the world communist movement." Both quotations are from the *Chicago Tribune*, which seems to have brooded on the fashion.
  - d. *Chemise* as part of the formal conclusion of a letter. An epistle in our campus paper was signed "Yours in a *Chemise*." This conclusion does not seem to have threatened the supremacy of "Yours truly," "Yours sincerely," and "Lots of love."
2. *Diorization*, noun. The word, the meaning of which is self-explanatory, illustrates how easily a proper noun may be transformed into a common one.

3. *Sack*, noun. Synonymous with *Chemise*.

*Sack* as a verb: "I expressly forbade my wife to *sack* it along with the other girls this year." (From a newspaper.) Also, a distinctive merged verb was formed by combining *sack* with the preposition/adverb *out*; the resultant verb appears as a participial adjective in the newspaper description of a woman who "walked down the stairs all *sacked-out*."

4. *Skiddoo*, noun. A night garment. This name suggests the Roaring Twenties background of the sack and its off-spring: *cp.* the familiar imperative *Twenty-three skiddoo* which is associated with that period. A mere linguist is unable to determine whether or not the *skiddoo* is identical to a *shimmy doll outfit*. The association of *shimmy* and the *chemise* movement is linguistically appropriate, however, for *shimmy* is a colloquial pronunciation of *chemise*. The semantic developments of the word have been curious: the anti-arthritic dance which now is called the *shimmy* gained its name because, to do it artistically, a girl had to shake her *shimmy*.

Now that the reader has started thinking once more about the bad old days of the tubular silhouette, he will be able to add numerous other sackological developments to those few cited above. If the major newspapers of the country were studied systematically, the issues of the Sack Period would probably yield literally thousands of interesting coinages and semantic modifications. Campus and national magazines would yield still more, as would fashion magazines and catalogues. A large-scale study of the sack as linguistic history would be a colossal undertaking, but even a limited investigation is rewarding.

The sack vocabulary undoubtedly will have only a slight effect on the language of the future, but it is significant historically, for it belongs to a specific time and to a specific group of people, namely ourselves. And it perhaps tells us more about our age than we would like to admit. Like the Roaring-Twenties parties and festivals of the contemporary campus, the sack look is a glance back at a decade which seems better and happier than our own. Such wistfulness is not unusual in history. Just as we look back fondly at the Twenties, for example, people of Tudor England looked back at ancient civilization and found in it values and ideals which changed their way of looking at their world. The result was what we feebly call the Renaissance, a period in which the English language reflected the renewed vitality of the human mind. By comparison, the Flapper Renaissance of the Fifties is a pitiful extravaganza; yet it has meaning for the historical linguist. Contemporary men, he realizes, live in a regimented world, a world of committees and "social norms" and togetherness. In their hearts, they rebel at this regimentation as



much as the Renaissance scientist rebelled at the regimentation of Aristotelianism. For them, the Twenties have become a symbol not of a "lost generation," but of a lost ideal; it symbolizes spontaneity and willfulness and the abandonment of rules which restrain the individual. It matters little what the Twenties were really like. Today, it is the dream-era of the drunken eunuch Jake Barnes and the high-living bootlegger Jay Gatsby, mythological figures who tower with a strange heroism over the organization men, the joiners, the sad souls who settle in the suburbs.

Some readers may be asking themselves if the last paragraph has a place in a linguistics paper. Is it the task of the language historian to consider the social and personal aspirations of an era? Is it not his job merely to analyze words themselves? To these questions there is a very simple answer: the historical linguist is a student of words spoken by people. If he divorces those words from the people who speak them—if he finds in language nothing more than a set of sounds to be described and a set of inflections to be catalogued—then he is an erudite sham. The genuine historical linguist seeks insight into man through words and insight into words through man. The high school or college teacher who can endow a group of young minds with these twin insights is a finer linguist than the specialist who can produce only devitalized tracts. By such study as I have attempted to sketch out here, students come to know how intimately bound up language is with the aspirations, achievements and fears of an era. They can watch language respond to the forces which challenge men's minds or mirror their attitudes.

When the class has gained an historical sense by contemplating the linguistic activity of its own age, it is ready to examine the sack fads and sputniks of the past. Here are a few such events which have made linguistic history:

1. Germanic tribes trade with the Romans.
2. Monastic reform sweeps through Old England.
3. Scandanavian pirates raid, then settle in England.
4. French become the language of English highbrows. (Middle English period)
5. Columbus discovers America and the New World is explored.
6. Modern warfare is born in Virginia and Tennessee. (Civil War period)
7. Baseball becomes an American passion.
8. Prohibition (and the Speakeasy) come into existence.
9. The Atomic Age begins.

10. Men are denounced as *Lollards*, *Papists* and *Reds* in the fourteenth, seventeenth and twentieth centuries respectively.

By using Baugh, Mencken, the historical dictionaries, and a little imagination, the teacher can make these events as vivid as the genesis of yesterday's slang. Newspaper files in the town library may be used in the study of the more recent of these happenings; also, where possible, the student should be encouraged to talk to people who have experienced the event being analyzed; grandpa's recollections of the early days of radio are excellent source material, for instance. (Possibly the same gentleman also recollects certain pieces of philological data relevant to the study of speakeasy-cocktail terminology.) Man learned to speak long before he learned to write, and the mouth is still the great font of language.

\* \* \*

Let us suppose that a gifted teacher takes my four sets of exercises, makes them his own, improves upon them, and uses them successfully in the classroom. Precisely what will he have accomplished in the infinite scheme of education? Certainly, he will not have created a roomful of polished writers overnight, for there is little practical value in the contemplation of metathesis lapses and outlandish dresses. All that the students will have learned is to look at language with the eye of history. All they will have gained from this knowledge is that love of language for its own sake, which once in a great while produces a character like Falstaff, a poem like *Paradise Lost*, a novel like *Huckleberry Finn*, or a conversationalist like Sam Johnson. More often, that love of language merely produces in time, a civilized human being who can read and write. Historical linguistics does not tell the individual what he *must* do if he is to use good English. It reveals to him what he *can* do with English if he respects it and takes delight in it. The only command it utters is a far cry from the usual rules and prescriptions. Language is alive, it tells the student, and you must keep it alive. To understand the history of our language, the student must begin with the individual; to preserve that history, he must begin in the same place. To each individual who speaks and writes English, a portion of its life has been entrusted. If that individual fails in his trust, he destroys the language of the past and despoils the language of the future. In language, there is no such thing as a "personal" failure; there is only the failure which drags down the heritage of others. Language history, however, does not dwell upon the fear of failure, but upon the allurements of success; it portrays our speech as a responsive personality who

accompanies man on his tragi-comic wanderings through time, a friend who is his music and his muse, who is his memory while he lives and his memorial when he dies. The young student who can respond to language as language responds to him may not have learned his English yet, but he has come to know her, and he will want to know her better. Each day he will find her history one day longer, one day more fascinating. But he must be warned that if he studies her long enough and passionately enough, this Cleopatra of sounds will bewitch him forever. One man who was thus bewitched might well have been thinking of the English language when he said of the lesser temptress that

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety: other women cloy  
The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry  
Where most she satisfies.<sup>12</sup>

### Notes

1. "History: the Life in Language," *Illinois English Bulletin*, XLVII, 8 (May, 1960). Hereafter referred to as "History."

2. The present attempt to collect and analyze the work of many semesters has caused me to modify some of my actual experiments and to elaborate on others. I have not yet subjected any single group of students to the full sequence of exercises which follow.

3. The following abbreviations are employed throughout: OED (*Oxford English Dictionary* also called the *New English Dictionary*); DAE (*Dictionary of American English*); DA (*Mathew's Dictionary of Americanisms*). For full titles, see "History," p. 23.

4. "History," pp. 10-16, sets forth six forces which stimulate linguistic change (Part 4, sections a-f). Of these six forces, *b* (the nature of sounds) and *c* (the personality of the language) seem too complex for student exercise work and have not been treated in this paper. As stated above, limitations of space do not permit the inclusion of loanword exercises, but *d* (the impact of external linguistic groups) is a factor in the Sputnik and Sack vocabularies discussed below, pp. 26 ff. The other forces are dealt with explicitly in the exercises: Part I, the study of lapses, concerns *d* (error); Part II, the study of coinages, deals with *a* (the desire to innovate); Part III, the study of semantic change, discusses intentional and unintentional meaning developments together for the sake of clarity; finally, Part IV deals with *e* (the impact of events). While they violate the order of presentation in "History," the exercises have been placed in the sequence which seems best suited to classroom presentation.

5. When the work of a linguist is cited only by the author's name, that work is cited in full either in the "History" bibliography, pp. 22-23, or in the supplementary bibliography at the end of the present paper. As a further space-saver, I have not attempted to cite the authorities from whose pages I have derived many of my illustrative forms; to have included these citations would have greatly increased the bulk of this already-too-long issue of the *Bulletin*. Many of the words discussed are examined in one or more of the



works cited in the bibliography, and may be studied there without difficulty if the word indices are consulted. Many other words are taken from my files of student exercises. Finally, many others were found through my own independent researches. My only important research aids which have not been listed in the two bibliographies are the familiar and ever-faithful collegiate dictionaries.

6. The following outline does not exhaust the possibilities of speech error: allophonic drift is not touched upon at all; see the discussion of *sweet*, "History," p. 12. Such rarified subjects demand specialized knowledge beyond the ken of the young student. Even the learned specialists find it difficult to explain phenomena like the Grimm's Law sound changes.—In the lapse examples cited here, suggestive spellings have been employed to indicate erroneous utterances; phonetic symbols would have been much more satisfactory from a scientific point of view, but some concessions must be made to the background of the student here. Ideally, every student of English should be taught the IPA symbols and should be able to use them in his class work; see Section V of the "History" bibliography, p. 23.

7. Most of the following were erroneously submitted by my students as individual lapses. The teacher should point out the difference between these common locutions and the speech blunder of a single person.

8. An excellent discussion of coinages will be found in Chapter 8 of Robertson and Cassidy, pp. 185 ff. A useful outline of the subject is presented in R. C. Simonini, Jr., "Etymological Categories of Present-Day English and Their Productivity," *Language Learning*, IX (1959), 1-5. I am indebted to both of these treatments, and have derived a few of my examples from them.

9. The following outline might have been arranged in such a way that it would indicate why coinages are created in the first place: to fill a gap in the vocabulary, to rejuvenate the language, to satisfy the coiner's ego, etc. However, I have focused the presentation upon the acceptance of coinages, for that is the specific subject of the exercise.

10. To an aviator, the *panel* is the instrument board in his cockpit. *Dip* is an underworld name for a pickpocket. The other professional meanings of the two words are to be found in *Webster's Collegiate*.

11. For other sputnikisms, see Arthur Minton, "Sputnik and Some of Its Offshoots," *Names*, VI (1958), 112-17.

12. I wish to extend my thanks to John A. Hamilton and Daniel Dungan of the University of Illinois for their helpful advice in the writing of this paper. Mr. Dungan very kindly permitted me to study the exercises which he formulated for his freshman rhetoric classes and Mr. Hamilton came to my aid in a hundred crises. No individual, however, has been more encouraging or more helpful in the present undertaking than Professor R. C. Simonini, Jr., of Longwood College, Virginia; his publications and his own language exercises have been invaluable. My greatest debt of gratitude, of course, is owed to my students. The data quoted from their classroom projects can not begin to suggest their contribution to this paper. If it had not been for their responsiveness and their intelligent delight in language, I could never have pursued such projects as I have outlined here. It is pleasant to think that many of these fine young people are already standing in front of their own classrooms; I know that they will bring the language to life for their own students as they have brought it to life for their former teacher.

### For Further Reading and Study

For those who wish to delve more extensively into the scholarship of historical linguistics than the introductory bibliography, "History," pp. 22-23, permits, I recommend the following works. Most of them will be particularly useful to those teachers who wish to devise exercises for their own classes or who hope to develop their linguistic background through independent study.

- I. Periodicals. Those which I consider particularly helpful are the following:

*American Speech* (The pages of this quarterly contain many interesting and frequently delightful articles on historical subjects. Every English teacher should read this journal religiously.)

*PMLA* (The May issue each year contains a bibliography of recent publications in the field of English linguistics; see the appropriate section under the general heading "English Language and Literature." Many fascinating leads may be picked up here.)

*Word Study* (An occasional publication of the G. & C. Merriam Company; contains much interesting wordlore.)

- II. Medieval English. If the reader is tempted to taste the delights of the older forms of our language, the following treatments may be of assistance:

Davis, Norman, *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer*, Oxford, 9th ed., 1953. (An admirable brief survey of Old English grammar and syntax, together with elementary reading selections, notes, and glossary.)

Moore, Samuel, and Thomas A. Knott, *The Elements of Old English*, rev. by James R. Hulbert, Ann Arbor, 10th ed., 1955. (For those who prefer their grammar broken down into a series of lessons; in addition to the lessons proper, the volume contains a convenient reference grammar and extensive reading selections. Syntax is not discussed.)

Mossé, Fernand, *A Handbook of Middle English*, trans. by James A. Walker, Baltimore, 1952. (The best introductory presentation of Middle English, though somewhat detailed; syntax is ably discussed and the reading selections, notes and glossary are first-rate. Before tackling this handbook, the beginner might read and study the chapter on Chaucer's language in Moore and Marckwardt, "History" bibliography, Section II. A reading of Chaucer himself is an excellent introduction to the language of his period.)

- III. American English. The following offer more detailed examinations of our language than the two books cited in the "History" bibliography: Krapp, George P., *The English Language in America*, 2 vols. New York, 1925. (A standard scholarly work.)

Mencken, H. L., *The American Language*, New York, 4th ed. 1936; supplementary volumes, 1945 and 1948. (One of the most informative and entertaining of all linguistic works.)

IV. Lapses. For those who wish to study speech blunders in greater detail than this paper permits, Sturtevant's treatment, "History" bibliography, Section I, will prove very helpful. The following article may serve as a model of the lapse studies which the teacher and his class may conduct:

Simonini, R. C., Jr., "Phonemic and Analogic Lapses in Radio and Television Speech," *American Speech*, XXXI (1956), 252-63.

V. More Dictionaries. An ever-increasing supply of special dictionaries is at hand to supplement the OED, the DAE and the DA. In the present article, I have made use of the following, all of which are of value and interest:

Berrey, Lester V., and Melvin van den Bark, *The American Thesaurus of Slang*, New York, 1942. (Enables the user to survey contemporary developments in individual areas of activity.)

Partridge, Eric, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, New York, 1937. (British slang together with "naturalized" Americanisms. Partridge has compiled a number of other useful lexicographical works which repay consultation.)

Skeat, Walter W., *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Oxford, 1910. (An old standby which is still of service.)

Waldorn, Arthur, *Concise Dictionary of the American Language*, New York, 1956. (An inexpensive little volume containing considerable lore.)

Wentworth, Harold, *American Dialect Dictionary*, New York, 1944. (The definitive work in this field has not yet been compiled; Wentworth, however, has gathered together a remarkable body of useful dialect material; particularly helpful in the study of regional catch-ons.)

VI. General. Advanced high school students as well as their teachers will find the following very interesting reading:

Hixon, Jerome C., and I. Colodny, *Word Ways*, New York, 1946. (Contains brief, helpful discussions of semantic and other varieties of linguistic change.)

Huppé, Bernard F., and Jack Kaminsky, *Logic and Language*, New York, 1956. (The linguistic discussion in this little book is stimulating and informative; there are also some exercises.)

### Postscript

I shall be delighted to hear from any teacher who essays historical study in his classroom. Any suggestions, criticisms or descriptions of fresh exercises will be warmly welcomed. Further, I shall be pleased to assist in the solving of any knotty problems which may arise in the execution of a given project; often, of course, I may be compelled to plead ignorance, but I shall look forward to hearing from those who are as puzzled—and intrigued—by the English language as I frequently am.



## Illinois Association of Teachers of English Fall Conference November 4-5, 1960 Champaign

### *Highlights*

Registration: 1 P.M. Friday, Foyer, 112 Gregory Hall  
8 A.M.—12 noon, Saturday, East Foyer, Lincoln Hall

Friday: 9 A.M.—Meeting of Executive Council

2:15 P.M.—Business Meeting, 112 Gregory Hall

2:30-4 P.M.—*Our Philosophy Today*

Speakers: Mrs. Charlotte Whittaker, Evanston, "Literature and Reading." Dr. J. N. Hook, University of Illinois, "Grammar and Writing."

4:30-5:30 P.M.—Open house at new NCTE Headquarters

6:15 P.M.—Banquet. Address: "Linguistics—Bane or Blessing for the Teacher of English" by Dr. Harold B. Allen, University of Minnesota, and First Vice-President of the NCTE.

Saturday: 9-10:25 A.M. and 10:35-12 noon. Discussion groups—each held twice

### *Problems That We Face*

1. What does "Shakespeare" say for the Space Age?
2. What constitutes a good theme?
3. What are the possibilities in the use of paperbacks in our classes?
4. What are some aids and problems in composition writing in junior high?
5. How can we make literature more meaningful in junior high?
6. What are some ways to meet the problems of beginning teachers?
7. What to us is the importance of the report *English for the Academically Talented*?
8. How can coordination of work of teachers in the English Department be brought about?
9. How can we use grammatical knowledge in writing and speaking?
10. What are some practical supplementary aids available for the English teacher?
11. Should world literature be taught in our schools?

12:30 P.M.—Luncheon. Address by Dr. Paul Landis, Department of English, University of Illinois

## NCTE Golden Anniversary Convention—Chicago November 24-25-26, 1960

Speakers: Richard Armour, Sean O'Faolain, J. B. Priestley, Ruth Strickland, Mark Van Doren

Friday Programs: Curriculum trends, critical thinking, images of the future, new methods, linguistics, class size, team teaching, teaching machines, the teaching of literature. . . .



